

[Cynthia Ann Biffle Sweeney]

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McGuire, Delise

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Briscoe County

District 17

"Pioneer Woman"

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(Interview with Cynthia Ann Biffle Sweeney) [?]

All history should start with the ancestors, so I am starting with my father, N. I. Biffle, who came from Wayne County, Tennessee. First going to illinois he lived there several months, then to Missouri, living there four years, all this moving being done in ox carts, sometimes in a two whell wheel ox cart. I claim to be a first class pioneer. Starting life as Cynthia Ann Biffle at Weatherford, Texas, in 1860, where my father N. I. Biffle ran a grist mill during the war between the states, and right here I want to pause and say my father ran this mill from six o'clock in the morning until the same time at night and then worked until mid-night helping the women card and spin for the poor widows and soldiers.

We lived in Weatherford while most of Texas still belonged to the Indians. The history of Cynthia Ann Parker was known by everyone. In 1881 my father was living on the county line between Stephens and Palo Pinto, the famous [??] railroad built right in front of our

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door. Texas was growing. On February 25, 1881 I married D. H., or [?] as old timers of Briscoe remember him, Sweeney. After [?] marriage we went to Jack county, living there three years.

On April 1, 1890 Mr. Sweeney started with his cattle to free grass in Briscoe County, reaching here in June. In the Spring there were heavy rains, lakes were full, many even joined. Grass could be cut for hay, all in all a cattleman's paradise. On reaching home Mr. Sweeney told everyone of this wonderful County, free grass, free everything. The old story had just started about the north pole and the barbed wire fence. So in October we came [?????] 2 out on the plains to view this promised land, spending our summer here and then going back to [Jak?] County for the winter, as my husband was afraid to spend the winter, for fear we might freese freeze as we only had a dugout and wood was scarce, except for the famous buffalo chips, which were life savers in the time of need. County Organized: March 10th., saw us back in our [?] home in the West, which at that time was the [?] dug-out of the Fall before. We arrived in time to help organize Briscoe County, on a snowy day, March 15, 1892. I will always remember Mr. Sweeney and my nephew, Fred Biffle, coming down the dug-out steps, stumping their feet from the cold, and his words, "Well, Annie, we helped make history for you and the children when we became organizers of this county today."

After the snow in March there wasn't any more moisture until in June, when we had a light rain. My first garden was a terrible failure, no rain, all the water it had I carried in buckets, then when the leaves sprouted in the day they were nibbled off by the rabbits at night. In September, it started to rain, [?] rained off and on for three weeks, but it was too late for crops. Cane grew about 12 inches high that year, but grass was fine, and the cattle wintered rolling fat. Cattle were not [?] fed for several years after we arrived, very little farming being [done?] Famous Ranches: With the country all open and no fences, it was a good cattle country. Cattle drifted south before northers, into Floyd and Crosby Counties. They sometimes went as far south as Yellow House Canyon. When Spring [came?] the little ranchmen rounded up their horses, rigged up a chuck wagon, every man got his

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bedding roll, and so the round-up started. Each man brought his cattle home. 3 The chuck-wagon was nicknamed by the big cattle companies, the "Bull Elk Wagon".

The "F" ranch was owned by Co. Goodnight; the Adairs owned the J. A. Ranch and all of Briscoe County not in the "F's" was in the "JA's". Our ranch was in the Hay Lake Community or the "F's" summer range.

My family at this time consisted of three children, Maud, Hiram, and Lonnie. My youngest son, Nes Sweeney, was born in Briscoe County, December 7, 1892.

Life on the Plains at this time was very hard, no conveniences whatever, few schools, doctors were far away, church was held when ministers were available in the old courthouse. Everything had to be freighted from Amarillo which was a hard five days trip, provided your team did not stray off during the night, as they often did, causing hours of walking, until you learned to hobble or stake one near camp. The lumber for our house was hauled this long distance. The house, a four room frame, two rooms below, two above, was only a shell. When our first windstorm came, lasting three days and two nights the first windstorm that I had ever seen, the frame work of our house almost fell in, but we propped it with heavy timbers. Needless to say, the wall stood and are standing today, northwest of Silverton. Tame Milk Cows: My children thought [no?] more of seeing bunches of antelope than we do of autos today. We had no milk cows, so a bunch of range cows were driven in and tested to see which would make the best milkers. The fun for the children started when a likely looking cow's head was tied to a fence post, both hind feet held by a rope, the milking started. In fact it was more like a 1936 Rodeo wild cow milking contest. 4 [?] Mr. Sweeney always did the roping, I had the tame job of milking. Some of those wild cows gave as much as a quart of milk.

Land was very cheap. My husband filed on one section, then bought another section from a man who did not like the country, paying him \$14.00 in money, a wagon and a tent to boot. A section was [boughtfor?] \$50.00 that had a spring of good water in the edge of the

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canyon, our cattle watered there for years. The last section bought has had a windmill, a small house and dug-out. This one cost us \$300 spot cash. Water was quite an item, most wells were deep and then not much water. Some wells were over 200 feet deep.

By the last of the Nineties all of my children went to school at Silverton.. Most of the time they went in a two wheeled cart or Jerkey, as some called them, from their jerky motion. They went seven and one-half miles, opening a number of wire gates. It was pretty cold on them, but there were not any hot house children in Briscoe County at that early date.

Most every section of school land was filed on by the early settlers, but the first dry years caused many to leave, so by 1893 and '94 none but the hardy ones were left. They had all gone back to fruit and society, as one family put it. The people staying on had livestock, especially cattle, [?] to help them make a living. [?] I was the staying [kind?] , having made only two moves since 1891: one to Tulia, and the other to my present home in Amarillo, Texas.

The real pioneer stock bad an eye to the future, and as Horace Greeley has said, "Go West, Young Man, and grow up with the Country", who would think of turning their his back on as fair and promising (1324N)